

Support public education

There's a culture and spirit in the Rio GrandeValley that is felt by everyone — we are a strong and

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RAISE YOUR HAND TEXAS

proud community, willing and able to endure and overcome whatever adversity might be thrown our way.

But when it comes to the state's refusal to fairly and fully fund our public schools, support our teachers and lift up our students, it's time to say, no more.

Texas public schools are among the largest and most diverse collection of

schools and students in the country. Across Texas, our schools employ more than 700,000 people — approximately half of whom are teachers — to educate 5.4 million students. Right here in the Rio GrandeValley, more than 20,000 Valley students and tens of thousands more teachers and public school staff need our state leaders to step up and do the right thing.

That's because our state ranks in the bottom 10 nationwide for per-student funding, around \$4,000 per student under the national average.

Even with a lack of funding, our Valley schools and students perform incredibly well with more than 50 Blue Ribbon awarded schools in the region. The Valley has many great performing schools, and diversity and choice can be found across the

many innovative, student-focused programs and specialty school options.

Yet, teachers and administrators are saddled with an accountability system and high-stakes testing that don't fairly, holistically or accurately measure students, teachers or campuses.

We've been asked to do more with less for too long.

While we have a strong delegation of Valley leaders showing support for public education, including Reps. Terry Canales, Erin Gamez, Bobby Guerra, Morgan LaMantia, Oscar Longoria, Armando Martinez, Sergio Muñoz Jr. and Sen. Chuy Hinojosa. We need the rest of the legislature to stand with us and for us.

This spring, Texas lawmakers appropriated some funds for public education, but the bulk of those funds are attached to specific programs and new requirements, not investments directly impacting our Valley students and teachers.

Why are our schools, our students and our teachers going without in spite of a record \$33 billion budget surplus? It's more about politics and optics than delivering critically important funding for our students and teachers.

The legislature's recently approved property tax relief does not deliver the funds our schools need most. Funding for our teachers and students doesn't change unless school funding formulas are increased. To increase per-student funding and provide real, lasting local tax relief for Texans, the state must increase

the basic allotment for our public schools.

Another special session looms on the horizon with state leaders pressing once again for school vouchers or education savings accounts, proposals that shift money away from public schools that serve the vast majority of Valley students.

Voucher programs fail to deliver on promised academic improvements. Recent research of some of the longest and largest voucher programs in the United States shows these programs do not improve student test scores or academic achievement over time, and what's worse they have a negative impact on college enrollment and completion rates for disadvantaged students.

A recent Charles Butt Foundation poll found Texans — by large margins — strongly favor requirements for private schools to publicly report all school finances, provide special education services, accept students with special needs, follow state curriculum guidelines, administer state standardized tests and accept students with discipline records. But private schools, vendors and the voucher programs proposed to date do not deliver transparency, accountability or equity.

Let's invest in our Valley's teachers, students and classrooms, because they are the future of Texas.

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